

GOVERNMENT AND THE ARTS: A VIABLE PARTNERSHIP

"The life of the arts, far from being an interruption, a distraction, in the life of a nation, is very close to the center of a nation's purpose...and is a test of the quality of a nation's civilization."

President John F. Kennedy

Statement prepared for Creative America, 1963 (Inscribed at the Kennedy Center for the performing Arts)

Introduction

People are often amazed when I tell them that Jasper Community Arts is a department of the City of Jasper, just like the Street Department or the Fire Department or the Parks Department. My response to them is usually, "Well, why wouldn't the city have an Arts Department?" Sure, they don't *need* an Arts Department any more than they don't *need* a swimming pool or a golf course.

Then I see the glow in their eyes as they follow-up (with some envy) with, "It must be nice to have all that government backing. You don't have to worry about budgets or anything." Hold on a minute; that's not true either. There are many advantages to being a government agency, but we have problems and challenges that free-standing arts entities don't have.

My goal here today is to discuss the good and bad points of a government/arts partnership and to give you some pointers to developing such a partnership in your own community.



History

After all the dust settles, after the warriors go home and the day-to-day challenges have faded, most civilizations are ultimately judged by the things they leave behind – their art and architecture and their form of government. (And, yes, religion, science and social structure also play a part but that is not part of our story here.)

Governments have been supporting the arts for a long time, since the building of the Roman coliseum or the Greek Lyceum, beauty and function have played a role in most societies. In the United States, the National Endowment for the Arts was founded in 1965 as an agency of the US government; however people often forget the wonderful arts projects created through the WPA which was established in 1935. Other countries also have a history of national support for the arts, such as, the United Arts Council in England (1942) and the Ministry of Arts in France (1962).

However, establishing government/arts partnerships isn't limited to national programs but can often be effected on a much smaller, more local scale. Most people are aware of the success of the partnership in Paducah, Kentucky, Bend, Oregon, and Branson, Missouri, but other small towns are equally successful. Fayetteville, Arkansas has a city-supported arts center and my home, Jasper, Indiana has had a partnership for 36 years.

The Jasper Arts Center (then Jasper Civic Auditorium), was initially conceived by a visionary group of leaders and businessmen who built it with private funds, then donated it to the City of Jasper. Their primary reasons for building the arts center were three-fold.

1. To create a large community meeting space (replacing a formerly-used church facility.)
2. To add to the quality of life of the local area by bringing in live performances.
3. To act as a recruiting tool for some of the skilled people that emerging local industries were trying to attract and keep.

To this end, they have been effective on all three counts.



Problems

The reasons for forming a government/arts alliance today are somewhat different but equally compelling.

1. Local governments are losing their tax base through declining industries and a population shift to other areas, particularly the warmer climates and larger cities. They need to find ways to attract and keep both the businesses and the people who run them.
2. Enlightened leaders are looking for ways to transition from manufacturing industries to service industries. After all, while the assembly line jobs may be disappearing, the people employed by the arts centers, galleries, shops, cafés, and hotels still add to the local tax base.
3. Government/arts partnerships can be efficiently run and end duplication of services. For example, arts centers are often tourist destinations and bring people into the area, saving local governments from spending excessive amounts on advertising and promotion outside the area.



What's in it for us?

Who benefits most in a government/arts partnership? The answer: EVERYONE! It's easy to see how both the government and the arts entities benefit from a partnership, but in fact, everyone in the community benefits.

Government	
Benefits	Liabilities
Cultural attraction	Misunderstanding of the arts
Quality of life issue <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attract and keep skilled workers. • Families look for cultural enrichment for their kids. • Retirees – always looking for something to do and they have more disposable income. 	Who do the arts serve? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locals? • Tourists? • Businesses? • Agencies?
Vision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives hope to local citizens • Helps the community distinguish itself • Status symbol 	Competing with different needs in the community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arts • Parks and recreations • Libraries • General government operations
Economic revitalization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiplier effect (Multiply 2.8 x for every (\$100K spent in the community) • Keeps local dollars local 	Limited funds to go around
Tourism dollars <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become a destination city 	No guarantee that partnership will succeed or see return on investment.

Arts	
Benefits	Liabilities
Provides economic stability	More procedures and rules
Limits duplication of services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accounting • Legal • Other – police, fire, street dept 	More accountability
Adds credibility	Government is SLOOOOOOWWWW!
Broadens base of support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic • Community • People to people 	Political <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone is your boss • Must be responsible to community standards
	Will always fight “those arty people” reputation
	Danger in viewing government partner as “moneybags” and forgetting that a partnership is a two-way street; the arts partner must give back to the community.

Call to Action

OK, you say, this sounds great. How do I climb on board and light a fire in my community? There are several steps that must be taken to create a government/arts partnership. This is just a basic outline but check out the bibliography for suggested resources.

How *do* you implement a partnership?

- Form a focus group – get the movers and shakers in your community involved. Identify a champion, someone with clout and the passion to help you in your mission.
- Partnerships - You won't be able to accomplish anything without getting the buy-in of many partners. The broader your base, the more likely you are to succeed. Most likely partners will be:
 - Schools
 - Local university
 - Service groups – Rotary, Kiwanis, sororities
 - Chamber of commerce
 - Tourism commissions
 - Art groups
 - Museums
 - Restaurateurs and hoteliers
 - Local businesses
- Find seed money.
 - Empty spaces (use available or abandoned spaces)
 - Art groups
 - Community leaders
 - Economic development task forces
 - Sugar daddy (big donor/patron)
- Focus on what you want to accomplish and build from there.
 - Who will you serve? Age groups, broad or narrow? Local or tourists?
 - Start small and build from there. Avoid overextending yourself the first few years.
 - Do your research
- Get legal advice – how to establish, how to operate.



Overcoming obstacles

Starting up any new enterprise, especially one as complicated as a government/arts partnership, will always have some challenges. Expect them and don't get discouraged if the road gets a little bumpy along the way. You will always encounter the naysayers who will tell you, "Well that might be fine for Sunshine City but that just won't work here." The best response is to just smile, thank them for their input, and go on to the next contact. However, there are some specific actions you can take to overcome some of these obstacles.

Learn the language of the people you're selling to.

- Art types – passion and vision, cultural awareness.
- Civic leaders – pride and the future, vision.
- Tax payers – benefits to the community.

- Volunteers – helping the community, carrying the message (People love to help with a new and exciting project.)
- Parents – always looking for some enrichment for their children.

Be patient.

- Make a time line.
- Start with a small implementation committee (too many voices water the message).

Conclusion

The reason why you think you can't form a government/arts partnership is the very reason why you should. Revitalization of your community through the arts can only add to your quality of life and economic base for the many reasons listed above. And what community isn't looking for ways to increase revenue these days? Look for your champions, form your focus groups, and get started now. If the government can partner with the arts in other communities, you can do it in your own community with patience and planning. Yes, you can!

Bibliography

Books and white papers

The Creative Community Builder's Handbook: How to Transform Communities Using Local Assets, Arts, and Culture Tom Borup 2006

The Rise of the Creative Class...and How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community & Everyday Life Richard Florida 2002

Marketing Places: Attracting Investment, Industry, and Tourism to Cities, States, and Nations Philip Kotler, Donald H. Haider, Irving Rein 1993

Museum Branding: How to Create and Maintain Image, Loyalty, and Support Margot A. Wallace 2006

Funding Public Art in Colorado Through Partnerships Christy A. George 2002

Market Feasibility of the Simon Silk Mill Complex as a Cultural Redevelopment Project Arts Market, Bozeman MT 2008

Public Opinion and Political Vulnerability: Why as the National Endowment for the Arts been Such an Attractive Target? Paul DiMaggio and Becky Pettit, Princeton University 1999

Internet sites

www.communityandculture.com

www.fieldstonealliance.org Fieldstone Guide to Forming Nonprofit Alliances

www.americansforthearts.org Lots of backup information, statistics for building your case.

I also recommend scouring search engines for "Partnership: Government Arts".